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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6293  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 8994  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 4868  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1008  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2398  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 002677

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2018

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SUBJECT: THAI UPDATE: QUIET SEPTEMBER 8, LOOKING TOWARDS  
UDON AND THE COURTS ON THE 9TH

REF: BANGKOK 02655 (THAI POLITICAL DEADLOCK)

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Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary and Comment

1. (C) After two weeks of rolling political crisis, the pace of events in Thailand slackened over the September 6-7 weekend. Senior political leadership in the House and Senate appeared to re-engage in an attempt to reach some common political ground on which the crisis could be settled; the parties engaged in the conflict, the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and Prime Minister Samak, have both dismissed this effort. In an apparent effort to bolster his supporters in the northeast and to defy the PAD protesters who are trying to paralyze his government by occupying the Government House compound, PM Samak will hold a mobile cabinet meeting on September 9 in the pro-government stronghold of Udon Thani, the location of a violent clash in late July between PAD and local pro-government street forces.

Adding to the sense of anticipation for a potentially bumpy Tuesday is a Constitutional Court decision expected at 1400 September 9 in the case of PM Samak's cooking show.

2. (C) Comment: While events in Bangkok have calmed under the steady hand of Army Commander Anuphong, who has refused to be drawn into political games by either side, many fear the chance for renewed violence is much greater in a provincial location like Udon, particularly given the clash there in July and the desire by hotheads on both sides to provoke conflict for their own reasons. If the Court were to rule against Samak, the decision could prove to be a spark to renewed open political conflict. The Ambassador and others will continue to engage with all parties with the same message in support of a peaceful resolution of the conflict within a constitutional framework. Like-minded Embassies are continuing to do the same. End Summary and Comment.

Slogging through the rain

3. (SBU) PAD protests of moderately diminishing numbers in Bangkok continued through the rain soaked weekend of September 6-7 amid swirling, though unfounded, rumors of pro

and anti government demonstrators flowing into Bangkok and the army going on alert. The PAD siege of Government House continued despite deteriorating living conditions at the site; the weekend rains turned the trampled grounds of Government House compound into a sea of mud. In an effort to ward off the increasingly unsanitary conditions, and diminish what the Thai press called the prevailing stench of urine, protest organizers began sprinkling white "disinfectant" powder over the stinking muddy ground. Protesters jokingly said they could bear the stench better than they could stand the government.

A glimmer of hope, dashed  
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14. (U) On Friday, September 5 the parliament made an attempt to offer mediation in the standoff between Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and the Peoples Alliance for Democracy (PAD), notwithstanding intransigence to date on both sides. House Speaker Chai Chidchop, Senate Speaker Prasopsuk Boondej, and opposition leader Abhisit Vejjajiva agreed that the dispute should be decided by negotiations and mediation, and that the use of force to quell the protests was not currently in the cards. Senator Prasopsuk agreed to be the mediator to find middle ground between the government and the PAD, while Chidchop and Abhisit said they would work within parliament to defuse the tensions fueling the crisis. Press sources indicated that Prasopsuk's strategy was to get the PAD to commit to ending the protest if Samak stepped down and the government was dissolved.

15. (SBU) Unfortunately, neither side responded positively. PAD leader Suriyasai Katasila told Senate representatives that the PAD would not talk to anyone until Prime Minister

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Samak had resigned. Somsak Kosaisuk, another core PAD leader, issued a statement urging Prasopsuk not to "cause confusion" though his attempts at mediation because the PAD was not prepared to discuss the situation with him. For his part, PM Samak said he would not negotiate with the PAD and that the only way out was through his referendum (See reftel). In press statements, Samak lamented that parliament could not deal with the crisis, that his attempts to use the judiciary had not been successful, and that invoking the emergency decree had failed to stem the protests.

Return of the mobile Cabinet, asking for trouble?  
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16. (U) In a move reminiscent of ex PM Thaksin holding mobile cabinet meetings elsewhere in the country more supportive of his agenda to avoid the siege of government offices in Bangkok during anti-government protests in 2006, PM Samak scheduled a mobile cabinet meeting for September 9 in the PPP Isaan (northeast) stronghold of Udon Thani. Critics say the location is intentionally provocative, since PAD and pro government activists clashed there in late July when a group supporting Samak's PPP led government attacked a PAD rally in Udon, leaving several injured; the brother of a deputy agriculture minister called for blood to be spilled on local community radio.

17. (C) Sean Boonpracong, a PR expert informally working for PM Samak under the guidance of ousted Minister Jakkraphob Penkair, told us on the margins of PM Samak's address on ASEAN at the MFA late September 8, that he heard that the PAD was sending a student delegation up to Udon to harass Samak. The local PAD leader in Udon claimed PAD group would gather in opposition of the cabinet meeting. In a disturbing example of how some radicals on both sides seem to invite violence, Boonpracong said he hoped there would be a good photo op "if the PAD succeeded in bloodying the PM," under the theory that would discredit the PAD in the eyes of the populace.

¶18. (U) Kwanchai Praipana, leader of the pro-government group in Udon responsible for violence in July against a PAD rally, has again exhorted followers to gather at a local Udon radio station and block any incoming PAD supporters. In the face of building tension in Udon, the Royal Thai Police has vowed to tighten security and prevent any clashes from occurring.

Going about business, with an eye to the courts  
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¶19. (SBU) PM Samak continues to be outwardly confident he will prevail in this crisis. During his weekly Sunday morning television program, he insisted he had no intention of either resigning or dissolving parliament. He also confirmed his intention to address the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 25. Samak delivered a previously scheduled lecture on the Thai Chairmanship of ASEAN September 8, after having appeared in the Constitutional Court earlier in the day to defend himself against charges he unlawfully benefited from a commercial contract related to his cooking show while serving as PM.

¶10. (C) Note: While courts normally announce their verdicts a week after the final hearing, the Constitutional Court indicated it will issue its verdict in the Samak cooking case at 1400 September 9, setting up a potential flash point for turmoil were the decision to go against Samak while he and the Cabinet are up country in a stronghold of support.

¶11. (U) In a separate development September 8, Saroj Chavanaviraj was formally endorsed by King Bhumiphol as Foreign Minister to replace Tej Bunnag, who resigned effective September 5. For a brief bio note, see reftel.  
JOHN